

## “A Father’s Day Message”

Mark 1:9-11

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The Greeting Card business thrives on special calendar dates like Father’s Day. I had a little fun looking at some Father’s Day cards that fall into the category of being humorous. Just how humorous these little greetings are I will leave to you. But hopefully they will bring a smile to your face.

We’ll start slowly. This first one is from a child who does not lack for self-esteem. From the sound of the card this might be an only child. Here’s the card: “Dad, without me today is just another day.” In a similar vein is the one that says, “Well done, Dad...I’m awesome.”

One with a huge golf club on the cover says, “For the most terrific dad.” The spelling is what makes this card work...Fore...the most Tee...rrific dad. Well, if golf jokes on Father’s Day are bad, the fishing ones are worse. “You’re reel cool, Dad.” (reel...) How about the picture of a frozen ice cream bar with the caption, “You are one cool pop” (Popsicle). This next Father’s Day card is a little bit of funny and a whole lot of true. “Best taxi driver...bravest bug hunter...cheapest handyman...most generous bank.”

I found the perfect card if you are giving dad a BBQ as a Father’s Day gift.

“Knock knock...who’s there...gorilla...gorilla who...gorilla yourself a steak”

If dad is an oenophile, that is one who loves fermented fruit from the vine;

“Knock knock...who’s there...wine...wine who?...wine not celebrate Father’s Day”

Speaking of grapes, when those grapes become dry they start dancing and singing songs like “I heard it through the grapevine.” Which leads to the Father’s Day card where a little dried grape says to a big dried grape, “Thanks for raisin me dad.”

Returning to the theme of grilling, “What did the hot dog say to the bun? Nice to meat you.” What I really like about that card is the note that accompanies the little joke. You see Father’s Day is the perfect day for bad jokes, because many bad jokes are known as Dad Jokes. So after the hot dog says to the bun, “Nice to meat you”, the sender of the card acknowledges that they have sent a bad dad joke...ha ha ha dad, I learned from the best.

Well, here’s my last one. I like this one a lot...a whole lot. It’s simple and yet deeply profound;

“Dad’s know a lot...grandpas know everything.” And that’s all I have to say about that.

Some churches think they are in the greeting card business. They put out signs. Since God is the head of every church, I guess you could call these church signs a version of Father’s Day cards. Imagine God the Father sending out these messages, messages that appear on church signs. Some of them I like. Some I’m not so sure about.

- No trespassing...prosecutors will be baptized
- God is the Potter...not Harry
- Don’t let worries kill you...let the church help
- There are some questions that can’t be answered by Google
- Let us help you study for your final exams
- Whoever stole our AC units, keep one...it’s hot where you’re going
- Need a lifeguard...ours walks on water
- God should be our steering wheel...not our spare tire
- Whoever is praying for snow...please stop
- We are not Dairy Queen, but we have great Sundays
- I was addicted to the Hokey Pokey, but I turned myself around
- The most powerful position is on your knees
- God answers knee mail

I’ll let you be the judge about whether these church signs communicate what we really want to communicate about God. But now that I have primed the pump with some humorous Father’s Day cards and added into the mix some church signs that purport to be messages

that might come from God, I want to make a move to something more consequential. You see, the Bible is the word of God. We celebrated the central place the Bible has in our life of faith last week as we dedicated our new pew Bibles. On this Father's Day, I want to take from these pages of the Bible some very important messages God has given to us, messages that we can take as being God's Father's Day message to us. As I share these "Father's Day Messages" from God our Father in heaven, I invite you to open your heart and receive words of healing and hope, words of joy and blessing, words of promise and words of peace.

- From Genesis 1, "My dear child, I made you in my own image."
- Again from Genesis 1, "And it is very good." Doesn't that mean God is saying to us, to his children created in his image, "And you are very good." In other words, God don't make no junk.
- Speaking to Abraham God said words that are for all of his children, "I will bless you."
- When the ladder came to Jacob in a dream, God's children heard these words, "I am with you. I will watch over you wherever you go. I will not leave you."
- From the burning bush our Father says to his children, ones who were beat down and broken, our Father says, "I have seen your suffering. I have heard your cries. I am concerned. And I have come down to help."
- In a message given numerous times, God tells us, "Do not fear," and similarly, "Be not afraid." He told it to Joshua when Moses handed him the baton and God said it's time to enter the Promised Land. "Do not be afraid...be strong and courageous." When the woes of life overwhelmed the prophet Jeremiah, overwhelmed the prophet so much he wrote a whole book filled with laments, words of heartache and discouragement, God said to this prophet who was in the pit of despair, "Do not be afraid." When the people returned to Jerusalem after the bitter time of exile, God twice told his prophets, "Do not be afraid." When the angel told Joseph the strange and awkward and even scandalous news that his bride to be Mary was pregnant, Joseph heard those same words, "Do not be afraid." Disciples who followed Jesus and found that even when

Jesus is with you the storms of life can rise with great fury, those disciples heard the message, “Do not be afraid.” Women who came to the tomb with fear and trepidation heard the message, “Do not be afraid.” And when the Revelation was given to John about the things that must surely come to be, early in the Revelation we hear once again, “Do not be afraid.”

- And when we are afraid, and when we do doubt, and when the challenges of life overwhelm us, God is there to say over and over again, “I will never leave you and I will never forsake you.”
- At our lowest times, when life has beaten us down and we struggle to believe God is really with us, when it just seems like maybe we have been forgotten and have slipped out of God’s sight, our Father sends us a message that I hope and pray we never forget. “I will not forget you. See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.”
- Dear friends, on this Father’s Day, let us be bathed in the refrain of Psalm 136. Over and over and over and over again, we hear this refrain, “His love endures forever.” The message is given to us 26 times in one psalm.
- Finally, on this Father’s Day, the First Letter of John has a wonderful greeting for all of us. “See what great love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God. And that is what we are!” Happy Father’s Day friends. We are all children of God.

We are all children of God. Notice that these Father’s Day messages have run the gamut from Genesis in the beginning to Revelation in the end. We have heard messages of the greatest blessing, of an undying love, of God’s presence in times of challenge and God’s presence in times of joy. We have heard the amazing news that we were created in the image of God, stamped with God’s image, and that our life is good, and full of meaning, and that God will stop at nothing to maintain his relationship with us...God will stop at nothing...loving us even so much that he would send his Beloved Son Jesus so that we would not be lost, not separated, not left behind.

Unfortunately, there is some bad news in the midst of these overwhelming proclamations of Good News. Maybe you have recognized that what God wants us to know, that our lives are of the greatest importance and that each of us is filled with immeasurable worth, that is a message we do not always receive from the world in which we live. Sometimes the messages we receive in this life are messages that our life is not meaningful, that our life is not worth much, that we do not measure up, that we do not belong, and that we do not matter. Sometimes the messages of life hurt us, wound us, crush us, and leave us filled with sadness and sorrow.

On this Father's Day, I want to share with you a story of how one person heard the message of God's love. I am happy to say they heard it in the house of God. I want to share with you a story of how one person heard the message that they were loved by their Father in heaven, and they heard that message in the church. I want to share this story of one person, because I think we all want to do everything we can to make sure this is a story that is not just for one person, but that is a story for every person.

The story begins with a bad word. The word is bastard. Bastard is not a word we use in church, and we would not use it today except that the person in the story had heard that word used to describe him over and over again. This story was told by Fred Craddock, a respected pastor who also wrote numerous books about preaching. Fred Craddock knew a thing or two about proclaiming the love of God our Father.

Fred tells how he and his wife Nettie were in the Smoky Mountains of Tennessee, in a little town called Cosby, near Gatlinburg. They were having a meal at the Black Bear Inn which has a great scenic view of the mountains out a big picture window. Early in the meal an elderly man approached the Craddock's table and said, 'Good Evening'.

Fred and his wife were hoping to have a quiet meal, but Fred said good evening back, and they had a conversation. Along the way the elderly man asked what Fred did. Fred said, "I am a Christian minister." The man asked--- 'Which church?'

Fred said, 'The Christian church'.

The man paused and then said: "I owe a great deal to a minister of the Christian church."

The man said: "I grew up in these mountains. My mother was not married and the whole community knew it. I was what was called in those days an illegitimate child, in fact they called me that ugly name—a bastard. In those days that was shameful, and I was ashamed. The reproach that fell on my mother fell also on me. When I went into town, I could see people staring at me, making guesses as to who my father was. At school the children said ugly things to me, so I stayed to myself at recess and at lunch.

In my early teens I began to attend a little church back in the mountains called Laurel Spring Christian Church. It had a minister who was both attractive and frightening. He had a chiseled face, a deep voice, and a heavy beard. I went to hear him preach, I don't know exactly why, but it did something for me. Because of my background I was afraid I was not welcome, since I was, as they put it, a bastard. I would go just in time for the sermon and then quickly leave before someone could ask me—what's a boy like you doing here?

One Sunday however I got trapped in the aisle, there were too many adults in front of me leaving, and I felt a heavy hand on my shoulder. It was that minister. I caught a glimpse of his beard and face and knew. I trembled in fear. He turned his face around so he could look me in the eye. He seemed to be staring at me forever so long. I knew what he was doing—he was sizing me up in order to guess who my father was. A moment later he said--- "well boy you are a child of..." and he paused there. I just knew what was coming, I just knew I would have my feelings hurt—again! I knew I would never go back to that church again. But then he said 'Boy, you are a child of---- God! I see a striking resemblance, boy.'" Then he swatted me on the bottom and said, 'Now go claim your inheritance.' I left church a different person that day. In fact, really that was the beginning of my life. I had been found, and found out, and I found out who I was."

Fred Craddock says that he was so moved by the story that he asked the man "What's your name?"

The man said “Ben Hooper”

Fred then said, “I suddenly recalled that my own father had once told me when I was just a child how the people of Tennessee had twice elected as governor a ‘bastard’ named Ben Hooper.”

The story ends with a nice twist. The little boy grew up to be governor. But that is not the best part. The best part, the part of this story that is gospel, the part of this story that is the good news of Jesus Christ, is that this little boy who was taunted and teased and ashamed and humiliated, this little boy one day had someone who grabbed him, someone who pulled him to their chest, someone who looked him in the eye, and someone who whispered in his ear, “You are a child of God.” And ever after, that little boy knew he belonged. That little boy knew he was loved. I hope you know it too. Your past does not define you. You have a new identity in Jesus Christ.

In fact, because of Jesus Christ, the words God said to Jesus when he was baptized are words God wants to say to us each and every day. The words at the baptism of Jesus are God’s eternal Father’s Day Message. God said to Jesus, “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” Because of what Jesus has done for us, we are all adopted into God’s family. And we are adopted not as outsiders or aliens. When we are adopted and the Holy Spirit fills our hearts, we cry out to God, just like we read in Romans 8 earlier today, we cry out to God, “Abba, Father.” We call out to God, “Abba, Father”, and God says to us, to you and to me, “You are my child, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” That’s our message from God today. Friends, “Happy Father’s Day.” Hear the good news. Your Father in heaven loves you.